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Francis Blomefield as a historian of Norfolk

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This is the first of two articles, which together will seek to examine the credentials of Francis Blomefield as the acknowledged historian of the county of Norfolk. This paper identifies Blomefield's contribution to the published history that bears his name and analyses his approach to dealing with the rural areas of the county and the borough of Thetford. A subsequent article will consider Blomefield's history of Norwich, and answer the question as to whether Blomefield was a historian, antiquary or topographer.

Introduction

The starting point for anyone wishing to learn about Francis Blomefield throughout the last century has been Walter Rye's account in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.¹ It is not an entirely favourable account, and three quotations will illustrate his opinion of his subject.

In critical faculty Blomefield was absolutely wanting, and he fell an easy victim to all the monstrous pedigree fabrications of the heralds.

Certain it is that in the five folio volumes there is vastly more of [Peter] Le Neve's work than Blomefield's, and to the former therefore should more justly be given the credit of being the county historian of Norfolk.

[Blomefield's work] is full of errors, its descriptions of all buildings singularly scanty and bald, and its attempts at etymology ludicrous in the extreme.

Yet he also has a few good things to say, describing Blomefield's *History of Norfolk*² as "an enduring monument of hard disinterested work, for it was wholly a labour of love, and as far as the facts chronicled it is usually very trustworthy." Likewise he says about the man:

A very good point in his character was the unselfish readiness with which he imparted his knowledge to others working in the same field.

Finally, Rye offers a backhanded compliment for a practice that today would have any historian thrown out and banned from the Norfolk Record Office, noting:

It is wonderful indeed how often searchers among manuscripts ... come across Blomefield's private mark or his beautifully legible handwriting on charters or rolls.

Thus Rye paints a picture of an incompetent historian, who relied upon other people's work, which he often misinterpreted, and that his own attempts at interpretation were amateurish and gullible. When he was able to use original sources, he tended to misunderstand, deface or otherwise damage them. In fact Rye's article studiously avoids describing Blomefield as a

“historian” throughout the article, referring to him rather as ‘a topographer’ and uses the word only to deny him the title of “county historian of Norfolk”.

In the opinion of the present writer, Walter Rye’s account is partial, unnecessarily abrasive, and does not stand up to detailed scrutiny, although it does contain some elements of truth. This article, and another to follow, will therefore seek to analyse the content of, and sources used in, Blomefield’s work and ask whether he deserves the title of historian of Norfolk. However, before doing so, it is first necessary to define exactly what is meant by Blomefield’s *History of Norfolk*

The five folio volumes of Francis Blomefield’s *An essay towards a topographical history of Norfolk*, were published in parts between 1736 and 1776,³ having been announced in proposals published in July 1733. The work can be seen as the partial fruition of a projected history of the county first conceived by Peter Le Neve about 1695,⁴ and which has never been satisfactorily completed. As first published, the work contains 4145 pages of letterpress (excluding preliminaries and indices),⁵ which fall into four categories:

Fistly, 2002 pages (48%) were written, printed and published by Blomefield between 1736 and his death in 1752. These constitute the whole of volumes 1 and 2 and the first 672 pages of volume 3, (except for the two hundreds noted in category 2 below). The first volume includes the account of Thetford (which was subsequently republished by Blomefield as a quarto volume in late 1739)⁶ and the second volume constitutes that of Norwich, which was simultaneously re-issued as a discrete folio history of the city between 1741 and 1745.⁷

Secondly, 254 pages (6%), covering the hundreds of Grimshoe and South Greenhoe were written by Charles Parkin, and were edited and published by Blomefield in 1738 (volume 1 pages 469-556) and 1749 (volume 3 pages 361-526), respectively.

After Blomefield’s death, the remainder of the county was largely completed by Charles Parkin between 1753 and 1765, who was responsible for a further 1782 pages (43%) which are included in volume 3 (pages 678-870), and the whole of volumes 4 and 5 (pages 1-1588).⁸ Parkin had been encouraged by Thomas Martin to “proceed in a more concise and agreeable manner than Mr Blomefield did”, and so he covered a proportionately larger area of the county.⁹ The King’s Lynn bookseller and publisher William Whittingham published these pages between 1769 and 1775 with some editorial help by Antony Norris and John Fenn. A part of this text was also reissued by him as the *Topography of Freebridge* in 1772.¹⁰

Finally, Parkin's account of the borough of Great Yarmouth was either never completed or was perhaps lost prior to publication. Whittingham therefore completed the history by commissioning an employee to compile a 107 page (2.5%) account abstracted from Swinden's history of the town.¹¹ This account was republished by Whittingham as an octavo volume in 1776. Although no name is given on the title page it was advertised as if it had been written by Parkin.¹²

The different parts of the whole work are of varied quality, and so these two papers will consider only that half of the work published between 1736 and 1752 and for which Blomefield was directly responsible. Of this approximately 60% related to rural areas of the county, either the villages, market towns or the brief introductions to each hundred. A further 36% related to the city of Norwich and 4% to Thetford.

Responsibility for the '*History of Norfolk*'

Walter Rye's statement "that in the five folio volumes there is vastly more of Le Neve's work than Blomefield's", is both difficult to justify and also to dismiss. Without question Blomefield was given ready access to the massive Le Neve collection which contained materials, and could not have undertaken his work without it. However, this collection was not the work of one man. It contained the notes and collections of many earlier antiquaries, including Sir Henry Spelman and Sir Thomas Browne, as well as those of his "little Society of Icenian Antiquaries" including John Kirkpatrick, Thomas Tanner and Benjamin Mackerell, and Thomas Martin.¹³ Much of Le Neve's collection was well ordered and digested, whereas other parts were a morass of barely decipherable notes, and slips.¹⁴

In addition to the Le Neve materials, Blomefield had collections of his own and was indebted to many of his contemporaries such as Charles Parkin, Anthony Norris, James Baldwin, Henry Briggs, John Holmes, Beaupré Bell and, above all, Thomas Martin. He was therefore far more than a compiler of another man's notes. He had the difficult task of extracting materials from a variety of sources, seeking to fill the gaps both by visiting parishes, circulating questionnaires, and then compiling a coherent narrative. In common with all historians, Blomefield used all materials available to him, but did so in an entirely proper way. He acknowledged his use of Le Neve's and the other collections in the advertisements for his work, cites them in the footnotes, and recognises their contribution in his introduction.

The design and content

The eighteenth century saw a transition in the writing of histories of towns and counties, away from an antiquarian tradition, towards a new conjectural or philosophical history which emerges during the 1750s. The antiquarian tradition originates with Camden's *Britannia* in 1586 and flowered during the second half of the seventeenth century under the influence of Dugdale, and his emulators. It is characterised by the presentation of information judged relevant in a systematic and comprehensive way, with a minimum of interpretation and commentary. As Charles Goodwyn noted to John Hutchins, the historian of Dorset:

“Antiquities of Counties are books not to be read, but consulted. It is their evidence which makes them valuable”¹⁵. The later “conjectural” historical tradition is particularly associated with the Scottish Enlightenment and involved more interpretation and analysis “to unravel the connexions between cause and effect, to explain how and why, rather than what”.¹⁶

Blomefield, who was compiling his history for about twenty years before his death in January 1752, understood and followed the antiquarian tradition. For much of his work he used a formula and methodology for such works developed by Dugdale and refined by Thoroton, Chauncy and others, and modelled his work upon them. This involved him in a detailed treatment of individual parishes chronicling the heraldry and genealogy of the lords of each manor from the time of the Conquest together with an account of the church, its fabric, monuments, the value of the living, and finally a list of the succession of incumbents and their patrons.¹⁷

The basis for the organisation of Blomefield's *History of Norfolk* is administrative. He dealt with boroughs of Norwich and Thetford independently from the country areas, with that of Norwich occupying an entire volume. The rural areas are covered by a series of discrete accounts of the hundreds, each of which is introduced by a brief account of the origin of the name, the extent of the boundaries and other administrative details such as whether the lordship of the hundred was associated with a particular manor. Thereafter, the text of each hundred consisted of a series of accounts of the individual parishes, each one aiming to be largely self-contained, and presented roughly in a geographical order.

From the point of view of the reader it is immaterial whether these accounts were arranged topographically, alphabetically within their hundreds, or in one alphabetical sequence for the county, so long as there were adequate indexes to the whole. But although Blomefield's arrangement is not fundamental to the usefulness of the work it was a helpful device for him

when compiling the narrative. By arranging his work in hundreds he was able to divide his task into manageable portions in a way which would be readily understood by his readers. It also enabled him to hive off recognisable parts to his collaborator. Above all this was the way in which many of his source materials (including the Le Neve collections) were arranged, and it was more convenient for him to extract the material for all of the villages of a hundred at the same time.

At first sight, the order in which Blomefield covered the hundreds is puzzling, for it was not determined by any historical or geographical considerations, but rather by the availability of materials ready for publication. This is a strong indication that Blomefield was not just relying upon Le Neve's and Tanner's collections, but was supplementing them with materials from his own and those of other antiquaries. He had always intended to begin with Diss Hundred, but originally was going to work eastwards through Earsham and Clavering towards Great Yarmouth. This was in order to give his collaborator Charles Parkin as much time as possible to prepare the western hundreds.¹⁸ However, in the event, during 1736 and 1737 he rather worked westwards from Diss through Giltcross and Shropham to Thetford. This was the area of Norfolk he knew best and for which he had been collecting historical materials ever since he was a schoolboy. Blomefield was by then finding that the publication of his monthly numbers was outstripping his ability to write up new material, and the detailed account of Thetford had exhausted everything available material by the middle of 1738.¹⁹ However Parkin had by then finished the hundred of Grimshoe, which was therefore included, comparatively early in the plan.²⁰ Thereafter Blomefield does not continue westwards into Clackclose and towards Lynn, which would have been the logical next step if he had been working geographically. He rather turns back towards Norwich with the hundreds of Wayland and Forehoe.

It had not been Blomefield's original plan to devote his second volume to Norwich; in September 1736 he had stated his intention of leaving the city to the end of the work.²¹ During 1738 and 1739 the publication of his first volume continued through the hundred of Wayland to its completion with Forehoe. Midway through Forehoe the author drafted a new set of proposals for his second volume showing that he was intending to press on with his existing method of working through each hundred in a more or less logical order, presumably commencing with Humbleyard and Depwade.²² His first volume was completed in December 1739, and after a short break to prepare indexes and marshal new material, Blomefield should have been ready to re-embark on his scheme during the spring of 1740. However seven years

were to elapse before the next hundred was published as the first part of the third volume. At some point in late 1739 or early 1740 the author radically, and quite suddenly, changed his plans.

The reasons for his concentration on Norwich, his wish to avoid the area around Lynn, and indeed his decision to re-publish the account of Thetford as a separate work all arose from a dispute he had with the antiquary Benjamin Mackerell, who had previously collaborated with Le Neve.²³ Mackerell resented both Thomas Martin's appropriation, and Blomefield's use, of the Le Neve materials, and considered that he ought to have been given responsibility for the urban areas of the county. Blomefield disagreed, but Mackerell decided to proceed anyway without the benefit of the Le Neve materials. He published a discreditable and entirely plagiarised account of Lynn under his own name in 1737, and then set to work writing his own admirable account of Norwich.²⁴ Although Mackerell died in April 1738, Blomefield was aware that he had left a completed history of Norwich ready for the press, which his family were seeking to publish.

Volume three (compiled and published from 1746 and left unfinished at Blomefield's death in January 1752), saw a return to his coverage of rural areas. Once again the order in which he covered them was dependent upon the availability of material. Blomefield, by now based in Norwich rather than Fersfield, worked southwards from the city through Humbleyard, Depwade and into Earsham, and then back again through Henstead. Again, he had chosen an area he knew fairly well and in which he had many contacts. However having again exhausted his available material by about 1750 he had to rely upon Parkin's account of South Greenhoe in the west of the county. Blomefield then started South Erpingham in the north, a hundred divorced from any other previously covered. Once again he had chosen another hundred that he knew as his father-in-law had been the rector of Buxton, and he had spent several weeks going through the muniment rooms of Oxnead Hall.²⁵ Had he lived, it is likely that he would have moved further north into the hundred of Holt where he also had plenty of material largely the result of the efforts of his friend Henry Briggs and John Holmes circulating his questionnaire.²⁶

It is not possible to determine the order in which the completion of the work was compiled, as the publisher was working with the Parkin's completed manuscript after his death.

Whittingham issued one part, to complete volume 3 in 1769, four parts to complete volume 4 by 1773 (each one progressively larger than the previous), and two parts for volume 5 in 1774 and 1775.²⁷

RURAL AREAS

The subjects covered and the detail included by Blomefield in his accounts of parishes varied considerably depending on the amount of information accessible to him. His elaborate questionnaire, drawn up in 1733, gives some idea of what the author considered to be an ideal entry for a village.²⁸ This covered many subsidiary topics such as Roman remains, archaeological finds, the existence of religious houses, guilds, chantries and noteworthy births and burials from the parish registers. Only the most comprehensive entries covered more than a few of these points, and the vast majority fell short of this ideal. However there was a basic minimum range of topics covered for virtually every village.

Place names

Ideally, Blomefield would begin with a short account of the place name if he felt he could offer a suitable explanation for its origin. However he was able to do this for less than one village in three, and for the remainder he was silent (except in the case of Shelfhanger where he admitted “the Signification of which, I can’t the least guess at”).²⁹ The study of place names was still in its infancy in the middle of the eighteenth century, and many such early attempts were later criticised with Richard Gough referring to them as ‘futile etymologies’.³⁰ Walter Rye poured scorn on Blomefield’s explanations describing them as;

ludicrous in the extreme; both Blomefield and his continuator apparently having water on the brain for they attempted to derive nearly every place name from some word or another which they allege to mean water.

Although Blomefield was frequently wrong in his explanations, this is not a fair assessment of his attempts. Certainly he relates too many of his explanations to geographical features such as streams, although in cases such as Marsham, Rushworth, Diss, or Langford, this technique led him to the correct answer. Where he most often erred was in underestimating the importance of personal names in the origin of place names in East Anglia. He realised that this element existed for he correctly explained Garboldisham as Gaerbald's ham and Osmundeston (the original name of Scole) as Osmund's tun, but he had insufficient documentary evidence of pre-Conquest forms of place names and little understanding of Saxon personal nomenclature to be more successful. Nevertheless Blomefield understood about the derivation of back formations and so did not fall into the trap of identifying Thetford as a ford over the river Thet, but rather as "the peoples' ford".³¹ At other times he endeavoured to be too clever in his derivations, such as his suggestion that his own village of

Fersfield was derived from a fair fee or village, rather than simply taking the name at its face value of a furze-covered field. It was not that Blomefield was failing to use any obvious source, rather that he was largely working in the dark, and in the absence of any suitable works of reference on this subject, any attempt was quite commendable.³²

Sources for the accounts of manors

After the etymology of the place name, there followed the entries for the village in the Domesday Survey, leading naturally to a consideration of the succession of the lords of the capital, and of any subsidiary manors from the Conquest until the eighteenth century. The information for these accounts came from a wide variety of sources which showed who held land in a particular parish on a given date, and under what circumstances. The framework for each was compiled from the various calendars, indexes, and extracts from national records collected by Peter Le Neve.

These accounts represented the core of Blomefield's history, and showed how the manor may have been subdivided, re-amalgamated, to form the complex pattern of land tenure which the author knew. The author might add genealogical information relating to the families holding the manor, particularly if one family had held the title over many generations. In a few cases, he also added genealogical tables for important families, especially if they had commissioned an engraving of their arms or else had provided the author with his information. In those villages where he had the necessary information, Blomefield would also go on to cover such matters as the existence of town lands, commons, fairs, markets, parish charities, schools, and any other matters which seemed to be of antiquarian interest.

The compilation of the succession of Lords of the manor probably represented Blomefield's most difficult and time-consuming task. For although the Le Neve collection provided most of the material on which they were based, Blomefield was in the unenviable position of interpreting the various references and placing them accurately within a constantly changing framework of manors existing in a village over several centuries. It was only in comparatively rare instances that there was a single manor remaining in one village, and any references in public or local records would only occasionally give sufficient information for identification purposes. Yet, in most cases Blomefield succeeded in carrying out this task as accurately as his source materials would allow, and only occasionally did he confuse references to different manors in the same parish.

PUBLIC RECORDS

The single most useful document consulted by Blomefield was Le Neve's transcript of the earliest public record relating to Norfolk - the Domesday Survey. This gave crucial information illustrating the pattern of land ownership and its division into manors before and after the Norman Conquest, usually providing the starting point for accounts of the manorial structure of a village.³³ Initially he included Domesday material in the body of his text, but this plan was soon abandoned in favour of the more concise and readable device of using footnotes.

Thereafter the main national sources on land tenure from Le Neve's collections were findings of the hundredal inquisitions held in 1274/5 known as the Hundred Rolls, the Testa de Nevil (containing accounts of 'knights fees and serjeantries in the thirteenth century), and the various accounts, returns, and surveys which were known as Feudal Aids.³⁴ Likewise the long series of Pipe Rolls gave material not only about revenues from royal demesne in the county but also various taxations and agreements by the king. Finally, some use was made of the Nomina Villarum, or returns listing what hundreds, cities, boroughs, and villages there were in 1315/6 and who were their lords.³⁵

More specific sources supplied by Le Neve included Inquisitions Post Mortem,³⁶ held on the death of the monarch's tenants-in-chief, Patent Rolls, incorporating grants and confirmations of liberties, offices, privileges, lands, and wardships, both to public bodies and private individuals³⁷, and legal records such as fines or final concords.³⁸ In these cases Blomefield had to rely on Le Neve's transcripts and it is unlikely that he ever saw even a proportion of the originals. Thus when Le Neve mis-transcribed the date of an Aid from a Pipe Roll, which he believed had been paid to King Stephen in 1139, Blomefield had no way of knowing that there were no surviving rolls for this reign and that he was therefore compounding an error.³⁹

Le Neve's transcripts and indexes were generally reliable and provided an access to national records, which was simply not available to other historians working at this time. The two volumes of the Domesday Survey, for example, were in London, ill-housed, difficult to use, and subject to exorbitant charges for their consultation. Accurate transcripts of parts of the work were always highly prized. Le Neve's copy was of particular use because the compiler had taken the trouble to rearrange the contents from its original feudal order into a more useful topographical arrangement. Thus it was feasible for Blomefield to see all the Domesday material relating to a particular village, just as it was comparatively easy for him to transcribe it all for a single hundred for the benefit of a collaborator.⁴⁰

LOCAL RECORDS

In spite of the enormous value of the Le Neve collection, Blomefield was frequently able to supplement it from other, more local sources, such as charters, deeds, wills, manorial records, family and estate papers.⁴¹ The use of purely parochial and manorial records was variable between villages and depended on such accidentals as the survival of particular categories of documents, whether or not the author knew of their existence, and whether he was granted access to them.⁴² For example in Bressingham, a village which Blomefield knew well, he was able to refer to the manorial court rolls, family accounts, extent rolls, an inventory of the manor, the Churchwardens' accounts, four surviving mediaeval charters, a petition from the inhabitants dating from 1638, and an account book of the guild of St Peter. In many other villages he might only refer to a single court roll, an odd charter, or perhaps no purely local records. Given the scale of his task, the historian would never have had the time systematically to search out, and consult, all of the surviving parochial and manorial records. He could do no more than incorporate such local material that was presented to him, or which he otherwise was aware of, and for the remainder rely on the large series of national and diocesan records which were more readily available to him.⁴³

CHARTERS

Private charters were occasionally enrolled in royal records for safe-keeping or because they were quoted in evidence in a court action.⁴⁴ However many charters, were also in private hands, either as original documents or in the form of monastic cartularies or charter rolls. In his first volume, Blomefield cites 23 individual charters, including several documents from his own collection and those of his friends. This figure only represents a fraction of the true total, which were used indirectly, as Le Neve had extracted many hundreds which were not individually cited.

Throughout the mediaeval period, religious houses were collectively the largest landholders in Norfolk and therefore their surviving records were of enormous interest to the county historian. The abbey of Bury St Edmunds, in particular, held large areas of land in the south of the county and constant reference was made to the various surviving registers and cartularies in the first volume of Blomefield's *Essay*.⁴⁵ Similarly he refers to cartularies from the priories of Binham, Blackborough Bromholm, Buckenham, Butley, Castle Acre, Eye, Hoxne, Thetford - the colleges of Mettingham, and St Mary's Thetford, the abbeys of Sibton and St Benet; and the cathedral priories of Ely and Norwich.⁴⁶ Many of these were in the

possession of Thomas Martin, either from his own or Peter Le Neve's collections. Others were made available by Blomefield's antiquarian friends James Baldwin, Mieux Rant, and Sir Edmund Bacon.⁴⁷ Other monastic charters, not otherwise available in their original form were preserved in Sir William Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum* which was one of the most heavily used reference books in the historian's library.⁴⁸

WILLS

The final class of document in constant use throughout the history for information on land tenure and the transmission of property, was wills. The most important series of these from Blomefield's point of view was preserved in the Bishop's (Consistory) Court and concerned any testator who held property in more than one of the four archdeaconries of the diocese of Norwich.⁴⁹ The wills of lesser men were preserved in the court of the appropriate archdeacon, and those of the wealthiest, who held lands in more than one diocese, were held in the Prerogative Court at Lambeth.⁵⁰ The Consistory Court wills were readily available in Norwich,⁵¹ and all the registers until the early sixteenth century were examined at various times by Tanner, Le Neve, Blomefield, and Charles Parkin.⁵² Wills enrolled in the Courts of the Archdeacons of Norfolk and Norwich are hardly mentioned in the history, either because they were not accessible to researchers or were not considered to be worth examining. The references to the Prerogative Court wills clearly came from Le Neve's collection as it is inconceivable that Blomefield would have had the opportunity to search systematically through this vast series of records in London.

Genealogy and heraldry

Blomefield's readers also had a considerable appetite for genealogy and heraldry. Inevitably, much of this information was incorporated in narrative form, although occasionally the author considered it worthwhile to deal with the history of a family in a separate section which might also include a genealogical table.⁵³ Here he was dealing with a subject of considerable interest to the local landed gentry, and he had on occasions to exercise some delicacy to avoid giving offence to potential subscribers and patrons. At times Blomefield is seen in a less than creditable light in so far that he was prepared to sacrifice veracity, or at least to suspend any value judgment on his sources, rather than upset some of the more important families in the county. He discussed his attitude to dealing with these matters in a letter to Nathaniel Salmon:

.... my whole design is, to write nothing but the truth to the best of my knowledge, and that, with an honourable respect to everyone. It not being my province to concern myself with dishonourable or bad actions of any present family, so that if I know anything honourable I always insert it, if otherwise I am under no obligation to mention it at all.⁵⁴

He was probably no less Honest or scrupulous in this respect than most contemporaries.

As Norroy King of Arms, Peter Le Neve assembled a great deal of genealogical information relating to Norfolk families, particularly from the Heraldic Visitations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some of the information from these sources was suspect, as Tudor Heralds sometimes provided powerful families with respectable (although totally fictitious) pedigrees.⁵⁵ Blomefield, appears to have trusted genealogical material provided by such Heralds as Le Neve and Dugdale although much of the material was merely transcribed from earlier Visitations. He also trusted the various printed works of reference at his disposal such as Brooke's *Catalogue of Nobility*, Collins' *Peerage*, and above all Dugdale's *Baronage of England*.⁵⁶

Again Walter Rye accuses Blomefield of.

falling an easy victim to all the monstrous pedigree fabrications of the Heralds, his pages chronicling as Gospel all the ridiculous family histories of the Howards, the Wodehouses, the Clares, and others, which bear their own contradictions on their faces.⁵⁷

Although it would have been theoretically possible for Blomefield to have exposed many of them using documents that were normally available, Rye's comment takes into account neither the practical difficulties of checking each pedigree, nor the general intellectual climate in which Blomefield was working

Similarly, Blomefield rarely sought to question genealogical materials supplied to him by notable county families, and inevitably was led into errors. He did not have had the time to verify genealogies from primary historical sources, and so if he found a pedigree amongst the Le Neve papers, or had one communicated to him by the family concerned, he was usually willing to accept it at face value and incorporate it in his history without further investigation. On occasions, Blomefield's actions may be the subject of more specific criticism. For example, at one stage he submitted draft genealogies to the families concerned with the invitation that they should alter anything they did not like.⁵⁸ He also conspired to obtain and subsequently to suppress a grant of arms that caused embarrassment to his friend Henry Briggs,⁵⁹ and the family's own account was published without alteration.

This purblind attribute to the genealogical sources, and his lack of a critical faculty over the pedigrees is reflected most strikingly in his account of his own family. Not only did he claim a most improbable descent from the armigerous family of De Bromefield of Kent, but also printed a genealogical table of his own family since Elizabethan times which was both confused and unnecessarily incorrect.⁶⁰ He might have easily compared his draft account with the entries in the Fersfield parish registers which were in his custody, thereby removing most of the mistakes, but he did not do so. He certainly recognised the value of parish registers as a historical source, as is shown by his reference to them in his questionnaire, and so it is difficult to offer any satisfactory explanation as to why he omitted to use them on this occasion.

Not surprisingly, he was sometimes accused of partiality to some families at the expense of others. He explained his attitude in a letter to William Jermy in 1737:

I am sorry my book should not please all, but never expected it. I have done & will do the best my little knowledge will enable me, & as to partiality. there can be nothing in that. But if gentlemen instead of giving, information about their family's withdraw what information they can, they and their families being not mentioned, is no fault of mine but their own, I bless God my dependance is upon m man living and living one more than another and therefore partiality in me would be to no purpose.⁶¹

Yet as can be seen the treatment of family history in Blomefield's work was not carried out in such a scholarly and disinterested way as would be expected from more recent works, although was entirely in keeping with the standards of his day.

In the matter of heraldry, Blomefield was conversant with the grammar of the subject and could recognise the arms borne by the most important families in Norfolk. He also realised the importance of collecting and recording heraldic information from a variety of sources such as funeral monuments, stained glass windows, and hatchments. He asked respondents to his questionnaire, about their own coat of arms, crest and motto, and included the question "can you tell when or by whom they were granted? or do you use it by custom as belonging to your ancestors?" However in the same way as he was always willing to accept the genealogies supplied to him at their face value, so was he willing to believe every claim that a family had the right to bear arms, just as the arms which he claimed as his own, and had engraved over his genealogy, were a pure concoction.

The parish church and its incumbents

The accounts of individual villages ended with a section relating to the parish church, its funeral monuments, the valuation of its benefice and a list of its incumbents. For these topics Peter Le Neve's collections failed him and Blomefield had to find other sources of information.

THE CHURCH FABRIC

From the evidence of his writings, Blomefield was not greatly interested in architecture nor did he consider it to be particularly relevant to his work. His parochial questionnaire, compiled in 1734, contains no reference to church architecture, but merely asked recipients whether their churches were still standing and if not for how long they had lain in ruins. Yet, when he sent his proposals to Beaupré Bell, he also undertook to perform a number of small services for his friend in June 1733. In return, he asked the favour of some notes relating to a number of churches close to Bell's home on the Norfolk and Cambridgeshire border, and included instructions as to the points to be covered:

Whether square or round tower, 5 or 6 bells, spire or not, clock or not, chimes or not, nave leaded thatched or tiled. Isles S[outh] & N[orth], whether thatched leaded &c, SO[uth] & No[rth] porch the same, cha[pels] same. Whither there be any cros isles or chapells at upper end of the isles. Whither the inscriptions are on brass or not, Mural or altar, monuments or flat stones & in what place. Whither the letters be capitals, old text or modern Roman. The present lords and rectors.⁶²

This may represent Blomefield's ideal entry for a description of a church building, but few contain this amount of detail, other than those buildings he knew well.⁶³ As an alternative he hoped to illustrate each parish church with a small engraving or woodcut at the beginning of the entry for the village,⁶⁴ but he soon had to abandon the idea because of the cost and difficulty of obtaining the illustrations. Thereafter he was usually content to ignore the architecture or dismiss it in a single sentence. Otherwise he was preoccupied with monumental inscriptions church property and the valuation of the living.

FUNERAL MONUMENTS

The cursory descriptions of the church fabrics, were more than compensated for by the extensive transcriptions of the funeral monuments of the gentry. This practice had developed into a recognised pursuit for the local antiquary from the early seventeenth century with John Weever's *Ancient funerall monuments*, and John Le Neve's *Monumenta Anglicana*.⁶⁵ Blomefield had been making notes of tombstones and mural monuments from his boyhood and was friends with likeminded men such as Antony Norris, who had made extensive

collections of their own.⁶⁶ Thus, the accounts of funeral monuments made up a significant part of the text and also contributed towards the attractions of the work for an eighteenth century reading public.

The bulk of the transcriptions were from Blomefield's own work or that of his friends, rather than the Le Neve collection. Many of the incumbents who received the questionnaire may themselves have had similar interests, and would have been more willing to carry out this comparatively simple and inoffensive task of transcribing monuments from their church, whilst having reservations about supplying an unknown author with detailed information about land tenure in their parish.

THE VALUATION OF THE BENEFICE

The value of each benefice was represented by the assessment of each of the taxations of ecclesiastical preferments⁶⁷ and the acreage of glebe. In the first hundreds Blomefield provided these figures in tabular form. His most obvious source for this information was the incumbents concerned (although it would have been possible for him to find the figures in the various archdeaconry records in Norwich). As the history progressed further afield, the author had frequently to omit particular entries from accounts rather than spend precious time in searching the records himself, if the incumbent was unwilling or unable to help.

The regular payments made by the clergy to their ecclesiastical superiors were synodals, procurations,⁶⁸ and tenths, the values of which would have been comparatively easy to find from the incumbents. In a few cases the author was able to record other single payments such as the first fruits⁶⁹ (made by the incumbent on taking up a new benefice), or the redundant annual taxation of Peter's pence.⁷⁰ With all of these payments, and the record of the acreage of glebe land, Blomefield only included the information when it was readily available.⁷¹ He failed to make any systematic search for a more complete account.

LIST OF INCUMBENTS

The final topic covered in the accounts of the churches was a list of incumbents and the patrons who held the advowson.⁷² The obvious source for this information was the complete series of institution books in the Norwich Diocesan Registry, and it is clear that Blomefield spent a considerable amount of time working through them and gleaning the necessary names and dates from the thirteenth century onwards. His work was made considerably easier by work previously undertaken by Thomas Tanner. During the years of his Chancellorship of the

Diocese, he had transcribed and collated the entries into a parochial order and had thereby produced an invaluable tool for any historian carrying out this task.⁷³

Blomefield went to considerable trouble to obtain access to Tanner's valuable manuscript both before and after the death of his friend. He asked to borrow Tanner's work in September 1733 but was refused although the bishop offered to transcribe entries to Blomefield's manuscript for each hundred.⁷⁴ After Tanner's death, Blomefield discovered that the collation was subject to an ambiguous clause in his will whereby it could be used by him or by anyone else who was willing to write an ecclesiastical history of Norwich. After a certain amount of trouble it appears that he was eventually able to gain temporary custody of this work, although it ultimately remained in the diocesan archive.⁷⁵

Although the institution books were the most useful source for names and dates of incumbents and patrons, they did not give a complete picture, and in many cases Blomefield was able to supplement information from chance references in many other records available to him. However, he failed to use one obvious source for the period dating from the middle of the seventeenth century; the Diocesan Subscription Books. These recorded the subscription to the rites of the Church of England, which was required of the clergy, teachers, and doctors in every parish, and would have done much to clear up gaps and ambiguities in Blomefield's accounts. For some reason the author did not make use of this source even though, as a clergyman, he must have known of its existence.⁷⁶

Other topics

Walter Rye is correct in his claim that Blomefield's "descriptions of all buildings [are] singularly scanty and bald". Blomefield rarely describes or even refers to major buildings in each parish other than the church. However, he considered manor house or country seats, to be worthy subjects for engraved illustrations. His questionnaire asked for the names of castles, manor houses, or halls, and their owners, but not for any architectural details. The lack of treatment of architectural antiquities in this history was later severely criticised by John Britton, in his *Architectural antiquities*, describing the work as prolix and dull.

This work,... contains but little information respecting the ancient buildings and other antiquities of the county; yet the authors are very minute in the names &c of incumbents, the number and dates of bells, inscriptions on tombstones, roofing of churches, and other trivial branches of topography. It may be safely said that no class

of literature has been more trifled with, and thence more neglected and despised by every discriminating reader, than the topographical.⁷⁷

Similarly, he does not appear to have been greatly concerned with the economy of the areas he was describing and only occasionally mentions such things as the crops grown and the occupations of the populace. Mills were usually only mentioned in connection with their recorded existence on early manorial documents, and therefore only as pieces of property. Neither was Blomefield greatly interested in the differences of geographical features between different parts of the county, and he rarely mentions such things as hills or rivers except where they might have given rise to the place name or constitute boundaries. Once again, the questionnaire asked the whereabouts of such geographical features but required no description of them.

MARKET TOWNS

Blomefield naturally deals with the rural areas of the county quite differently from the towns and city of Norwich. Rural society is primarily concerned with the means of agricultural production and therefore the use and ownership of land. On the other hand, urban communities have usually grown up as centres of trade, and manufacture, because they were strategically located, for defence or for the movement of goods. In turn, towns developed different administrative structures to cope with the regulation of trade and the problems of living in a more complex and close-knit society. However, between the extremes of the village and the large urban centre, there lay the country market town, which displayed some aspects of each. The size and functions of these were extremely varied depending on the local conditions. One comparatively small market might be renowned over a large area for a single product, whereas another which was larger, but without any specialisation, might be known only in its immediate locality.

Blomefield's accounts of market towns make interesting and diverse reading. They show him torn between trying to fit his coverage within the traditional framework for a topographical description of a village, whilst realising that such places were of an essentially different character and required additional consideration. In so far that there were more likely to be schools, charities, guilds, and persons of note to describe for the market towns, they received more detailed treatment. In a few instances, the author went on to talk about street names, the size of population (if known) and other topographical features. However, in common with other early county historians, Blomefield did not really recognise in his work that the

fundamental feature affecting the prosperity of a market town was its market, and so this important aspect of the town life received little attention.

The account of Diss, which opens the first volume of his work, is not typical and is far more detailed than many others. Nevertheless, it perhaps represents his ideal entry for such a community and well illustrates this point. Following a discussion of the place name, a detailed account of the manors, the church and the living, he went on to include brief biographies of a number of notable townsmen such as Walter of Diss, or John Skelton. He then gave a detailed description of the Chapel of St Nicholas and its use by the guilds of St Nicholas and Corpus Christi, a lengthy account of various town lands and other community properties such as alms house and a workhouse, together with paragraphs describing the commons the charity school, and the grammar school. Most unusually, he then gave a brief but interesting description of Diss mere, its fish, the problems of pollution by the townspeople, and its use in fire fighting. Finally, he named the main streets and hamlets, commented on the state of the paving, and provided a variety of miscellaneous statistics about the town.

Blomefield was a little unfortunate in his decision to start with Diss, because six years after he published his account of the town, there came to light a sensational murder case involving a local tailor convicted of poisoning the fiancé of his young male lover. The public execution of Robert Carlton in April 1742 attracted huge crowds to the town, and created a great public spectacle lasting several days. It also gave the historian the opportunity of writing his own detailed account of events incorporating his comments on local morals and his opinions of "all such villains, & especially to those of this place, who were concerned with him in his detestable practices". However, this account remained unpublished and was merely incorporated into a volume of the history which he had deliberately printed on one side of the sheet only to record additional materials.⁷⁸

Within the long and detailed account of Diss the existence of the market was dismissed in a single sentence. The author merely told his readers that it was held on Fridays and was particularly well known for the sale of linen cloths.⁷⁹ In a similar fashion, the markets of East Harling, Watton, and Aylsham were dismissed in a sentence, and those of Attleborough and Hingham were not even noticed, although each of these towns otherwise received detailed entries. In the case of Wymondham, it was noted that the jurisdiction of the market belonged to Lord Hobart, and that King John had first granted the privilege of a weekly market and annual fair in 1203, although here the author made no reference to the produce that was

sold.⁸⁰ A little more detail was provided for New Buckenham relating to the origin of the market, the privileges held by its court, and the functions of the market steward, but this was only included because Blomefield had access to the rolls of this court from Le Neve's collection.⁸¹ Nothing was said of its contemporary state. Throughout the history there are virtually no descriptions of market buildings or crosses nor any consideration of the communities and areas served. Even in Blomefield's extremely detailed account of the borough of Thetford he did not seek to describe its important market although a certain amount of historical and administrative information relating to it is found scattered in a number of places in the text. There was no reason why Blomefield could not have provided this information for some of the larger markets in the county, if he had wished to seek for it, but he did not think it important to do so.

Yet he was not totally lacking in an appreciation of economic factors in his accounts of market towns - although he afforded them a low priority compared with other topics and usually only described them in a historical context. Thus, in the account of Aylsham, the author observes that once the town had been the centre of the linen trade in Norfolk although by the early seventeenth century this had declined and the population had taken to knitting wool, and in turn this trade had been demolished by the modern invention of weaving. Similarly, in the account of Wymondham he quoted a few lines from the *Magna Britannia* saying the town was famous for making "taps, spindles, spoons, and such like wooden ware in abundance".⁸² Blomefield clearly saw his county through the eyes of a topographical historian rather than a topographer, and was far more concerned with its past than its present state.

THE BOROUGH OF THETFORD

Blomefield's comprehensive *History of the ancient city and burgh of Thetford*, was published in four folio numbers between the spring of 1737 and May 1738, although in all probability much of the text was compiled and written sometime beforehand, perhaps beginning when he was a schoolboy in the town.⁸³ After each number was printed, the type was reformatted into a quarto page size and again reprinted on better quality paper. These sheets were issued as an independent work following the completion of the first volume of the history of Norfolk in late 1739 or early 1740.⁸⁴ The reprint enabled him to add some errata and a twelve page Appendix containing the full texts of documents together with one or two more woodcut illustrations.⁸⁵

However, Blomefield confesses that he regarded his account as provisional:

And thus I have finished the General History of this Town, A more exact Account of which, I hope to see published by Mr. Thomas Martin, whose large Collections, and great Abilities for such an Undertaking, would without doubt, do more Justice, to the Grandeur, and Antiquity of the Place, than either my Collections, or Abilities would enable me to do.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, the account of Thetford shows the historian working in an area he knew well. He had available a wide variety of source material, but the subject matter was on a scale which he could competently handle. As a result, this was a detailed and informative piece of urban history although in some respects it may be seen as the precursor to his much more impressive history of Norwich. The work is particularly strong when dealing with the pre-Conquest history of the town when its comparative importance to the county was paramount, although the author sometimes allowed himself to include too much inessential general background material for this period. Yet for all his painstaking efforts in recording minute detail, the author was more than a little disappointed by the lack of interest in his work shown by the citizens.

As an instance how antiquity is encouraged among us, my account of Thetford being drawn up, I made what application I could to enable me to publish small draughts of the present ruins, the seals of all the religious houses, which I have by me, a plan of the present & ancient town, of the money coined & of the coins found here, but all to no purpose, not one would subscribe 2 pence. Nay the late mayor tho' he was a subscriber, took none, & the present is no subscriber at all, the whole town affording me not above 6.⁸⁷

A few of these planned illustrations of seals, and local coins, but not the plan of the town, were included as small woodcut images at Blomefield's own expense, rather than as the engravings he originally envisaged.

Thetfordn presented Blomefield with a number of problems not found elsewhere. Although the majority of the town lay in Norfolk, it straddled the county boundary and the area to the south of the river was in the hundred of Lackford in Suffolk, and therefore likely to be recorded in entirely different sources. Secondly, for most places in Norfolk Blomefield had no documentary information pre-dating Domesday, and he was incapable of interpreting or even perhaps recognising other relevant surviving evidence. Thetford had been the capital of the Kings of the East Angles; it had also been identified with the Roman station of Sitomagus,⁸⁸ although modern research shows that there is no conclusive evidence of settlement before the coming of the Angles. Inevitably the content of the account was different from any town he had covered so far.

The city (as it then was) warranted frequent mention in various mediaeval and Tudor chronicles which described this period.⁸⁹ These references provided the author with sufficient of a framework for him to apply his own extensive knowledge of the history and topography of the town which he had gained during his years at school there. He attempted to identify the sites of the early fortifications with reference to the layout of the town as he knew it, and discussed why various remains existed in some locations whilst elsewhere others had disappeared without trace.⁹⁰ In so doing he displayed a new dimension of his talent as a historian and also left many clues to future generations as to the state of the town when he was writing.

With his account of Thetford Blomefield went beyond the purely local. His history had hitherto contained no general introduction to the early history of the region, and realising this omission, he took the opportunity of including some of this background material under Thetford. Nevertheless, the accounts of significant events in ancient East Anglia which he gave were described in relation to the early capital of the region.⁹¹ Similarly, the author found that he had also to deal with the short-lived Bishopric and Deanery of Thetford within his account of the town although they administered a wide area of the county.⁹² However, with the decline in importance of the borough following the removal of the bishop's seat to Norwich in 1094, the account was able to revert to his normal subject approach, dealing only with the various institutions and features within the town boundaries.

The Domesday material for Thetford provided the basis for two chapters entitled "Of the state of the city in the Confessor's time" and "Of the Division of the Earldom, Lordship, and Manor; and of the state of the city in the Conqueror's time".⁹³ This brought to an end the chronological treatment of the history of the borough since the time of the Romans.

Thereafter most of the topics covered were not fundamentally different from those appearing in the accounts of the more important market towns, but the complexity of the history of Thetford together with the vast quantity of original material collected by the author meant that he was now working on a scale that was altogether larger. Thus the descent of the capital and subsidiary manors were covered in two chapters - quite independently of the Domesday material,⁹⁴ and the author had to identify and describe twenty parish churches and twelve monastic foundations of varying sizes which had once existed in the borough. The Cluniac Priory alone was as important as Wymondham Priory and so was described in equal detail. Similarly other matters which might have been dismissed in one or two sentences in the

accounts of market towns - such as the grammar school, the secular hospital, and brief accounts of famous authors from the borough - were given a short chapter apiece.

The two concluding chapters deal with topics which could not have been covered in the accounts of the largest market town; the mint, and the Corporation. The first of these is of some interest for it shows the historian aggregating evidence from inscriptions on early coins minted in the town with various stray references to the existence of a mint in the national records. The second was much longer and contained a serious attempt at describing the origins and development of the town government and administration together with other antiquarian information for which there was no other home.

This account of the Thetford Corporation is interesting for it recognised the importance of the corporate identity of the borough and thus displays an additional level of maturity over many contemporary urban histories. Most early histories of towns and cities provided chronological lists of the main office holders, such as the mayors, coroners, and where appropriate members of Parliament, but Blomefield went a great deal further. During the Middle Ages and early Tudor period Thetford had been a borough only by prescription and the earliest royal charter dated from 1573. Nevertheless the historian was able to piece together from both national and local sources a fairly full account of the government during the mediaeval period and the rights and duties of the citizens. He then provided a detailed analysis of the Elizabethan charter and recounted subsequent minor changes.

Yet in common with his general approach, he did not go on to supply any contemporary description of the town he knew so well, covering its trade and government, streets and lanes, or natural history - as was later to appear in Thomas Martin's account.⁹⁵ Blomefield rather chose to list the names of local benefactors and transcribe various inscriptions from the guild hall. The one manufacturing business in the town in the 1730s was a paper-mill which supplied the paper for Blomefield's history. Paper making was relatively novel in Norfolk, having been introduced in the 1690s and Blomefield is known to have visited the mill in Thetford in order to negotiate over paper supplies with Thomas Russell the papermaker.⁹⁶ Yet he did not think it worthwhile to describe the plant, and mentions its existence only fleetingly, firstly in the account of St Audrey's parish, and secondly to note that in April 1737 a 13 stone sturgeon, was caught in the paper mill pool.⁹⁷

The great bulk and detail of Blomefield's account of Thetford therefore gives the first volume of his history an imbalance and is in marked contrast to the space allotted to market towns of

similar size such Wymondham, Attleborough, or Diss. At one stage he had given serious thought to the possibility of publishing the account of the town as a separate self-contained book, but eventually decided rather to reduce the number of transcripts from documents which he would have preferred to include.⁹⁸ Some of this missing material was later included in an appendix to the quarto version which he published in a limited edition. The remainder appeared in Thomas Martin's account of the town, edited from his notes by Richard Gough after his death.⁹⁹

Therefore, the account of Thetford, as it appears in the first volume of the history of Norfolk, is a compromise between the particular treatment which the author wished to give to the borough in which he had been educated, and the more general needs of his history of the county. He had begun to recognise that not only did the individual institutions and features of such a town have a history, but so too did the town itself. At the same time he was not able to break away completely from the framework he used for villages and market towns, for although he provided a chronological account of Thetford during the early historical period, he made no attempt to continue this after the Norman Conquest. The full development of the author's techniques as an urban historian, and his complete break with the conventions of rural history, did not take place until his subsequent history of the city and county of Norwich. This "still remain[s] the fullest account of the development of the institutions and antiquities, secular and ecclesiastical, of the city",¹⁰⁰ and will be considered in a subsequent article.

3 February 2003

Notes

¹ *Dictionary of national biography*, entry for Francis Blomefield. Rye later extended his account and republished as 'Francis Blomefield', *Norfolk Antiquarian Miscellany*, Vol. III, (1887), 177-184.

² Francis Blomefield, *An essay towards a topographical history of Norfolk*, 5 vols. (1739-75), hereafter cited as Blomefield, *An essay*.

³ A brief account of the publication and an analysis of the content is provided in David Stoker, 'Blomefield's History of Norfolk', *Factotum: Newsletter of the XVIII century STC*, No. 26, (1988), 17-22.

⁴ Peter Le Neve's projected history was never completed. It was announced in 1695, (Richard Gough, *British Topography*, 2 vols. (1780), Vol. II., 2. His manuscript proposals survive among the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society deposit in the Norfolk Record Office.

⁵ The work was reprinted without amendment in octavo 11 volumes between 1805 and 1810. All references in this article are to the original folio printed edition.

⁶ Francis Blomefield, *The history of the ancient city and Burgh of Thetford* (1739).

⁷ Francis Blomefield, *The history of the city and county of Norwich*, (1745).

⁸ David Stoker, 'Mr Parkin's magpie, the other Mr Whittingham, and the fate of Great Yarmouth', *The Library: Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, 6th series Vol. XII, (1990), 121-30.

⁹ British Library. Addl. Ms. 5993 f.73 (a letter from Thomas Martin to William Cole, 11 May 1755).

¹⁰ Charles Parkin, *The topography of Freebridge Hundred and Half, in ... Norfolk*, (1762). The date is misprinted for 1772.

¹¹ Henry Swinden, *The history and antiquities of the ancient burgh of Great Yarmouth*, (1772).

¹² *The history and antiquities of Great Yarmouth*, (1776). For an account of the publication of this work see Stoker, 'Mr Parkin's magpie', 121-30.

¹³ This informal group of antiquaries, which met during the first quarter of the century, is described thus in a letter from Tanner to Le Neve (John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, 8 vols. (London 1817-58), Vol. III, 433.

¹⁴ For an account of Le Neve's collections see the introduction to *The chorography of Suffolk*, ed. Diarmaid MacCulloch, Suffolk Record Society, XIX, (1976), 1-4.

¹⁵ Bodleian Library MS Top. Gen. D.2, f.117, 3 June 1767.

¹⁶ Rosemary Sweet, *The writing of urban histories in eighteenth century England*, (1997), 144.

¹⁷ Initially he allowed himself to digress into matters not strictly relevant to a topographical history of Norfolk - such as his discussion in favour of the use of seals rather than signatures on official documents, which occurs in the account of Shimpling, (Blomefield, *An essay*, I., 105). However he quickly dropped this practice as he began to realise that his work was going to be bulky enough without such supplementary material. He likewise exercised his rights as editor and cut a three page essay on appropriations and a single page discussion on the status of non-preaching clergy from Parkin's account of the parish of Dudlington, and a description of the rites of the church in England under "Popery" from Little Cressingham from Parkin's account of the hundred of South Greenhoe (N.R.O. Frere Mss for South Greenhoe). Thereafter he stuck to an established formula.

¹⁸ Francis Blomefield, *The Correspondence of the Reverend Francis Blomefield*, edited by David Stoker, Norfolk Record Society, (1992), 61-2. Hereafter cited as Blomefield, *Correspondence*.

¹⁹ Part 16 of volume 1, which almost completes the account of Thetford was despatched to his London agent on 26 May 1738 (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 214).

²⁰ Parkin's manuscript of Grimshoe, with Blomefield's annotations and amendments is among the Frere Manuscripts in the NRO.

²¹ Letter to William Winde 16 September 1736 (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 173-4).

²² Bodleian Library Ms. Gough Norfolk 6., part of the manuscript relating to Kimberly is written on the back of a draft copy of these proposals.

²³ David Stoker, 'Benjamin Mackerell, antiquary, librarian, and plagiarist', *Norfolk Archaeology*, Vol. XLII, (1993/4), 1-12.

²⁴ Benjamin Mackerell, *The history and antiquities of the flourishing corporation of King's Lynn*, (1738), and 'The history of the City of Norwich both antient & modern', (N.R.O. NNAS Safe II, 1a-b).

²⁵ Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 84-5, and David Stoker, 'Innumerable letters of good consequence in history: the discovery and first publication of the Paston Letters', *The Library: Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, 6th Series Vol. XVII, (1995), 107-155.

²⁶ These materials are described in B. Cozens-Hardy, *A calendar of such of the Frere Manuscripts as relate to the Hundred of Holt*, Norfolk Record Society (1931).

²⁷ Details and publication schedules (where known) are given in David Stoker, 'The compilation and production of a classic county history - a study of the work of Francis Blomefield 1705-52', University of Reading M.Phil. thesis, (1982), Chapter 6 and Appendix A.)

²⁸ See G.A. Stephen, 'Francis Blomefield's queries in preparation for his history of Norfolk', *Norfolk Archaeology*, Vol. XX, (1921), 1-10.

²⁹ Blomefield, *An essay*, Vol. I, 6.

³⁰ Richard Gough, *British topography*, 2 vols. (1780), Vol. II., xxi.

³¹ He did however make a similar mistake with Tasburgh, although on this occasion he may have been misled by an incorrect identification of the river Tas in Thomas Gale's commentary on the 'Itinerary' of Antonius in *Rerum Anglicarum scriptores veteres* 3 vols. (1684-91).

³² The Norfolk antiquary Sir Henry Spelman was one of the first men to apply critical techniques to the problem of place-name etymologies, during the seventeenth century. His work was no doubt responsible for the interest taken in the subject by Blomefield and Parkin. Charles Parkin was particularly interested in the study of place names and he contributed a long essay on the subject as the major part of his preface. It was this discourse, which probably gave rise to Walter Rye's derogatory comments about Blomefield. For in pointing out errors in derivations given for places throughout England, and in wisely stressing the need to study the earliest known forms of the name, Parkin illustrated his particular obsession with water. Blomefield *An essay*, Vol. IV. iv-viii. Parkin did also admit his belief that most place names derive from water in a footnote to his account of Salle (Vol. IV. 426).

³³ The importance of the Domesday survey was recognised by Blomefield and Parkin, by the numerous references in the text and by their decision to incorporate verbatim extracts of material relating to each manor in their footnotes.

³⁴ *Guide to the contents of the Public Record Office*, 3 vols. (1963-68), Vol. I, 62 and 190.

³⁵ *Guide to the contents of the P.R.O.*, Vol. I, 75-6.

³⁶ *Guide to the contents of the P.R.O.*, Vol. I, 27-8. Blomefield occasionally refers to Inquisitions Post Mortem as "escheats" as well as the more technical name.

³⁷ The earliest final concords record agreements made between two parties in a genuine dispute, but gradually a system developed whereby they became a means of conveying or settling freehold property and registering the transaction with the Court of Common Pleas. *Guide to the contents of the P.R.O.*, Vol. I, 22-4.

³⁸ Plea rolls from the courts of Kings Bench and Common Pleas were also used. However, although Le Neve had indexed and abstracted the Norfolk fines, but it is unlikely that he was able to do this systematically with the two massive series of plea rolls, *Guide to the contents of the P.R.O.*, Vol. I, 135-6.

³⁹ Blomefield *An essay*, Vol. I., 407, and Frere Ms. Thetford.

⁴⁰ Blomefield supplied transcripts from Domesday not only to Charles Parkin but also so to his friends James Baldwin and Beaupré Bell (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 62, 223).

⁴¹ The extent to which access to local records might be a fruitful source of information is illustrated in a letter to Major Weldon, 13 May 1735 where Blomefield mentions having seen ten boxes of court rolls, surveys, extent books, deeds, and other items relating to the various manors held by the Paston family (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 84-5).

⁴² Blomefield's questionnaire to the local incumbents asked for details of any such records which were known to them as well as for any existing accounts or memoirs of the lords of the manor.

⁴³ Apart from Le Neve's indexes and transcripts Blomefield had available some of the earliest examples of printed editions of works compiled from the public records. These included Thomas Rymer's massive collection of records known as *Foedera*, 20 vols. (1704-35), Sir Robert Cotton, *An exact abridgement of the records in the Tower of London, from the reign of King Edward the Second, unto King Richard the Third*, (1657), Thomas Madox, *The history and antiquities of the Exchequer of the kings of England*, (1711), and *Liber Niger Scaccarii. E codice, calamo exarato ... descripsit et edidit T. Hearnius*, (1728).

⁴⁴ Private charters were enrolled with the Patent rolls, Common Pleas Plea Polls (Placita de Banco), Kings Bench Plea Rolls (Placita Coram Rege) and even some of the early Pipe rolls.

⁴⁵ The registers are listed in Godfrey Davis, *Mediaeval cartularies of Great Britain.. a short catalogue* (1958), nos. 95-136. Blomefield makes reference in his footnotes to registers Pinchbeck, Curteys, Sacristae, Album, Kemp, Chartarum, Niger Vestiarum, and Liber Consuetudinarius.

⁴⁶ Peter Le Neve had made transcripts from cartularies of monasteries further afield, particularly those in the collection of Sir Robert Cotton. Blomefield was able to refer to deeds from such distant religious houses as Bylands Abbey in Yorkshire and Lewes Priory in Sussex (B.L. Cotton Ms. Vespasian F xv.)

⁴⁷ Baldwin owned a cartulary and account book of Sibton Abbey. Mieux Rant owned a register of Buckenham Priory.

⁴⁸ Robert Dodsworth and William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, 3 vols. (1655-1673).

⁴⁹ The archdeaconries of Norfolk, Norwich, Suffolk, and Sudbury.

⁵⁰ The wills of testators who held lands in both the provinces of Canterbury and York would also be preserved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. There are also some minor peculiar jurisdictions in the Diocese of Norwich which could prove certain wills.

⁵¹ Letter to Thomas Tanner 7 September 1733, (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 65) He wrote "the present Chancellor is a very great friend to me, permitting me to use all the institution and will books".

⁵² Blomefield initialled and marked each of these volumes.

⁵³ Blomefield replaced a number of genealogical tables in Parkin's manuscript for South Greenhoe with narrative pedigrees. He may have done this because they were easier to print.

⁵⁴ Letter to Nathaniel Salmon 7 December 1737, (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 193-4).

⁵⁵ See Anthony Wagner 'Criticism and Tudor Heraldry', *English Genealogy*, (1972) 361. Wagner also considers the coverage of genealogy by eighteenth century county historians (371).

⁵⁶ Ralph Brooke, *A catalogue and succession*, (1622), Arthur Collins, *The Peerage of England*; 3 vols. (1735), and Sir. William Dugdale, *The Baronage of England*, 2 vols. (1675-6).

⁵⁷ *DNB* article on Blomefield.

⁵⁸ Note to Thomas Havers on the draft of his pedigree (Bodl. Lib Ms. Gough Norfolk 6, under Thelveton), and a letter to William Winde 24 May 1738 (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 210-1).

⁵⁹ Letters to Henry Briggs January 1735/6 (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 130-1).

⁶⁰ Blomefield *An essay* Vol. I., 66. He did not attempt to trace the supposed link between the late sixteenth century references to his family and the De Bromefields but he nevertheless adapted their arms as his own. Walter Rye pointed out this fallacy ('The Real pedigree of Blomefield' *Some Historical Essays chiefly relating to Norfolk* 3 vols. (1926) 205-7) but his conclusions about the historian's background, were equally speculative and unsupported by documentary evidence. T.L.M. Hawes has corrected the mistakes in Blomefield's genealogical table ('Genealogy of the Reverend Francis Blomefield', *Norfolk Archaeology*, (1981) 59-66.

⁶¹ Letter to William Jermy, 28 October 1737 (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 180).

⁶² Letter to Beaupré Bell, 26 June 1733 (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 62-3).

⁶³ A good example is Blomefield's description of Attleborough church which he compiled during a visit on 25 May 1736 (NRO. NNAS c 3/2/9) which gives a lot of information about the fabric, the bells, windows and funeral monuments

⁶⁴ Letter to William Toms, 1 May 1736 (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 150-1).

⁶⁵ John Weever, *Ancient funerall monuments*, (1631) and John Le Neve, *Monumenta Anglicana*, 5 vols (1717-9).

⁶⁶ It is difficult to assess the true extent of Norris's' collections of church notes at this time as he continued to add to them throughout his long life (NRO Ms. Rye 6 contains 6 volumes of Norris's notes.). A large number of the accounts of churches in Blomefield's notebooks carry annotations to the effect that they were provided by Norris See also Norris's letter of 31 August 1733 (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 68).

⁶⁷ The sums which the incumbent had to pay annually to his superiors. There had been three ecclesiastical assessments, which Blomefield referred to as the Norwich Taxation, (The papal taxation of Innocent IV of 1254, see W.E. Lunt, *The valuation of Norwich*, (1926)), the Lincoln Taxation, (the papal taxation of Nicholas IV in 1291, see *Taxatio ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae*, (1802)), and the King's Books (the valuation of Henry VIII -12, his break with the church of Rome, see *Valor ecclesiasticus*, 6 vols. (1810-34)). In each case the original was among the Public Records, and there were no transcriptions in the Le Neve collection. However he was able to discover the relevant entries for the two early clerical assessments for about eighteen parishes from secondary sources such as monastic records. On the other hand, details from the valuation of Henry VIII (the King's Books) were in print in Ecton's *Liber valorum et decimarum* (1711) and so presented no problem for the majority of benefices.

⁶⁸ Usually Blomefield only recorded procurations payable to the archdeacon as those payable to the bishop could be calculated as 3d in the pound of the value in the King's books.

⁶⁹ In the majority of cases the first fruits were omitted as they could be calculated by subtracting the tenths from the value in the King's books (see the footnote to the valuation of Diss rectory Blomefield, *An essay*, I., 13).

⁷⁰ This papal taxation was abolished by Henry VIII.

⁷¹ In a letter to Thomas Tanner dated 17 November 1735, Blomefield complained that he was "at a loss sometimes for procurations & synodals, the rectors themselves giving m sometimes a wrong account" (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 103-5).

⁷² In the early hundreds, Blomefield frequently incorporated a lot of biographical information about the incumbents, including details of their publications, careers, coats of arms, and if he knew the man, a brief account of his character. In some cases, such as the poet John Skelton who was rector of Diss such a detailed biographical treatment was warranted, but as time went on such additional information was given on fewer and fewer occasions.

⁷³ The manuscript is described in M.J. Sommerlad, 'The historical and antiquarian interests of Thomas Tanner', (University of Oxford D.Phil., thesis 1962), 140-1.

⁷⁴ Letters to and from Thomas Tanner, 7 September and 22 October 1733 (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 65-6).

⁷⁵ Blomefield's attempts at clarifying the position and gaining access to the manuscript are outlined in letters to and from John Tanner, dated between 26 December 1735 and 31 January 1735/6 and to Dr Nash 8 January 1735/6, (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 116-9, 128, 140-1).

⁷⁶ Blomefield's list of incumbents, and his failure to use this source is discussed in J. Carter, *Norwich Subscription Books*, (1937), 50-4.

⁷⁷ John Britton, *Architectural antiquities of Great Britain*, 5 vols. (1805-26), quoted from [John Chambers], *A general history of the county of Norfolk*, (1829), 562. The quotation arises from Charles Parkin's failure to notice the remain of the priory church at Binham.

⁷⁸ Bodleian Library MS. Gough Norfolk 43, under Diss. For an account of the trial and execution of Robert Carlton see D. Stoker 'The tailor of Diss: sodomy and murder in a Norfolk market town', *Factotum: Newsletter of the XVIII century STC*, XXXI, (1990), 18-21.

⁷⁹ Blomefield, *An essay* I., 25.

⁸⁰ Blomefield, *An essay* I., 719 and 742.

⁸¹ Blomefield, *An essay* I., 268.

⁸² Blomefield, *An essay* III., 558, and I 742

⁸³ In addition to the manuscript of this account which was used by the printer (Bodleian Library, Ms. Gough Norfolk 7) there is a shorter and apparently earlier version in Blomefield's handwriting in the collection of the Thetford Grammar School, which contains the material from chapters XXI.

⁸⁴ Francis Blomefield, *The history of the ancient city and Burgh of Thetford* (1739). The dedication of this work to Sir John Wodehouse, Recorder of Thetford is dated 11 December 1739, which roughly corresponds with the date for the completion of first volume of the history of Norfolk.

⁸⁵ Blomefield, *The history of the ancient city and Burgh of Thetford*, 184 and Appendix

⁸⁶ Blomefield, *An essay*, I., 468.

⁸⁷ Blomefield explained his plans and disappointments regarding his account of Thetford in a letter to Browne Willis 15 May 1738 (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 212-5). Some of the illustrations planned subsequently appeared as woodcuts.

⁸⁸ Blomefield accepted Robert Plot's identification of Thetford with Sitomagus and reprinted his arguments (*An essay*, I., 374-7), although they had already been denied by Thomas Gale in *Antonini iter Britanniarum commentariis illustratum Thomæ Gale*, (1709) and Nathaniel Salmon in *Roman stations in Britain* (1726).

⁸⁹ Most of the chronicles were readily available in published editions by the early eighteenth century and so for the first time in Blomefield's work references to printed rather than manuscript sources dominate his footnotes.

⁹⁰ Blomefield, *An essay* I., 377-79.

⁹¹ See the chapters “Of the city under the Saxons”, and “Of the coming of the Danes and destruction of the city”, Blomefield, *An essay* I., 382-390.

⁹² Blomefield, *An essay* I., 403-407.

⁹³ Blomefield, *An essay* I., 400-403.

⁹⁴ Blomefield, *An essay* I., 407-411.

⁹⁵ Thomas Martin, *The history of the town of Thetford, in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk*, (1779), 53-60, and 298-300.

⁹⁶ D. Stoker, ‘The early history of paper-making in Norfolk’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, XXXVI, (1976), 241-252, and the letter to Thomas Russell 6 January 1736, (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 127).

⁹⁷ Blomefield, *An essay* I., 464, and 418.

⁹⁸ Letter to Browne Willis 15 May. 1738, (Blomefield, *Correspondence*, 212-4).

⁹⁹ Thomas Martin, *The history of the town of Thetford, in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk*, (1779).

¹⁰⁰ Hassell Smith and Roger Virgoe, ‘Norfolk’, in *A guide to English county histories*, ed. C.R.J Currie and C.P. Lewis, (1997), 283.